

Emirates NBA Cup

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Oklahoma City Thunder

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander

Semifinal Practice Day



Q. Shai, last time you played in this building, it was for Canada alongside Dillon Brooks. I'm just curious, now that you're going against them, is there any back and forth there? Is there any added motivation?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, playing against a guy that I'm close with obviously, but when we both get out there, we're competing. We're trying to take each other's heads off, and we're both after winning basketball games and winning this Cup.

So it won't be friendly tomorrow, but we can deal with it after.

Q. Normally I would ask you a basketball question, but I've got to ask you if the album is going to come out anytime soon because not only the captions that you have, a lot of time with your posts, you post a lot of unreleased music there. A lot of times I go to Spotify, and I'm like, I can't even find the track on there too. You have a lot of Easter eggs in there as well with J-Dub giving the caption. Speak to us about the process. Is there a process with all of that? Where do the bars come from, bro? Where do you get that from?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Just my music friends is who I get that from. Whoever you listen to, I'm cool with. I get to listen to music a little ahead of time.

Then Dub is just bored at home and breaking out my captions. But the captions just like, they just come to me. Whatever's going on, whatever's trending, whatever's -- I just sit there for a bit, think a little bit and pop it out.

Q. This year you've made significant strides as a defender with your steal numbers going up. I'm just wondering how you approach guarding some of the league's best players. Is it day to day, week to week?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: I just try to make whoever I'm guarding play on their weaknesses. The NBA is full of really, really good players. You're not always going to be successful. But trying as much as often to get them to play within their weaknesses and not their

strengths, I've found a little bit of success.

Q. What would a win, not only tomorrow but then Tuesday so you get the Cup, what would that mean to you?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: It would mean a lot. It's the opportunity to win, play the game at a high level. As a kid, you tie your shoes up and play AAU ball to win the tournament at the weekend. You go to college to try to win NCAA Tournament or the tournament at the beginning of the season, the Maui Invitational, whatever it's called.

You're always trying to win. That's my mindset. That's my teammates' mindset. You're always trying to win. So it would be an opportunity for us to win and do something we love every day, play basketball.

Q. The college part of that, you've been in a program where you're expected to win games. I don't know if it's the same in the NBA because you're all pros, but you're in this single-elimination tournament as the No. 1 overall seed. Do you take anything from that, as though this is a tournament that you should win or is yours to win or anything like that?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: No, not at all. Like any basketball game, I don't see it as anyone should win before the game tips. You go out there, and you have to earn the victory.

Now, what that looks like every night is going to change, but you have to go out there and earn it. You'd be a fool to think that you deserve to win before you go out there and do so. So I don't have that mindset in any game I play really.

Q. J-Dub, you and Cason are among the NBA steals leaders. Definitely there's more than three of you can guard. I think there's also like Alex, Dort. How do you guys align with each other internally to be able to play that kind of defense so aggressively?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Part of it is our rim protectors. They do such a good job that it allows us to gamble sometimes and be aggressive, knowing that they're

behind us to clean stuff up. But calling it like it is, we have a lot of guys that are really good defensively, just like their hands and instincts.

Obviously, Caruso is proven. Lu is special. Cason's hands are really good. Dub guards all five positions at 6-5. We have a lot of guys who instinctually are really good at defense, and then at the end of the night, we all try to compete. When you mix those two together, it's pretty good defensively.

Q. Shai, at 20 years old you were put in a position of great responsibility, not just with the basketball in your hands, but organizationally to put your handprints on the program. What have you guys built to allow young guys -- I mean, guys that are the same age that you were, Cason and Mitchell and some of these guys, to contribute to winning on kind of the stage that you guys have gotten yourself onto now?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: I watch a lot of basketball. One thing I've noticed is winning, it takes the same ingredients no matter what level. At the end of the day, you can implement that in any situation. Myself and Coach obviously, Lu, I think we've been here the longest, K-Rich. We try to make sure we stay true to those core values that we have as a team and an organization and allow players that are coming in to understand what they're coming into. And then that's what we hold them to as a standard.

From there, it keeps everything consistent and keeps our standard consistent. We have built on that and got better at that. Then you add getting better as players, and the sky's not the limit. We can go as far as we want to. But I think we have a really good foundation, and that's allowed us to ascend.

Q. A few of the guys seem really excited about the two national games. Some of you guys, at least from Alex's point of view, at least Alex felt a lack of national coverage. But considering that feeling, those emotions, what does this showcase mean in terms of being on the national stage and you guys wanting to be showcased?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: It's fun. As a kid, you grow up, you watch Lakers versus Boston on TV. You watch Miami versus Cleveland. You watch marquee matchups and you watch big games, and you dream about getting there one day.

To be in this position is special. You don't take it for granted. At the end of the day, you just want to win. But it's pretty sweet to be highlighted and showcased in a way.

Yeah, it's what dreams are all about, and for them to come true is special.

Q. My question is not about the NBA Cup or the Thunder. I want to ask you about a coach you know pretty well. I want to ask you about Jordi. Do you expect the Nets to be playing so well? What does that coach mean to you?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Jordi is a really good coach. We obviously spent the last two summers together and achieved some special things.

Yeah, he has a way he's trying to play basketball. He holds his players accountable, and that way he plays basketball. Players know what to expect from him, and because of that steadiness, it's easy to play for him. I think that's why you're seeing them have the success they've had.

They go out there. They play hard. They play together. They play free. They're all aggressive. They're all in attack mode. They all can shoot. They're all ready to shoot.

Yeah, he instills confidence in his players. You're going to get the best out of your players because of that. I think that's why we've seen them excel the way they have.

Q. Do you think this is the beginning of a great career as a head coach?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Absolutely. He's just going to continue to grow, continue to get better. Yeah, he's doing a great job.

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